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ABSTRACT

This document outlines an approach to creativity called "developmental dramatics," in which process is considered to be infinitely more important than performance. "Four pillars of the foundation of learning" are explored in discussions of art and visual, music, movement, and make-believe activities. Basic guidelines for conducting the activities appropriately are suggested. For example, in the area of visual arts, teachers are encouraged to let children teach them what they see. In the area of music, teachers are reminded to sing in the children's vocal range, not the range in which the teachers are most comfortable. In the area of movement, teachers are encouraged to drop everything several times a day and exercise with the children. It is argued that the greatest potential for creativity is located in the area of make-believe. Developmental dramatics provides a perfect framework for letting children create. While children frequently forget a story they have heard, they remember the smallest details of stories that are acted out. (RH)

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MUSIC--MOVEMENT--MAKE-BELIEVE; THE LINK BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND THINKING SKILLS

By Sharron Lucky

April 18,1990

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As teachers of young children, your life is a constant quest for creative experiences through which you can impart information. At no other time in a student's education are we so challenged by communication inadequacies.

Before a child can talk, read or express feelings -- he/she is a sponge, soaking up information. The teacher must search diligently for the right tools and the right path for imparting knowledge. Innately gifted in artskills, children learn best from adults who approach through that path.

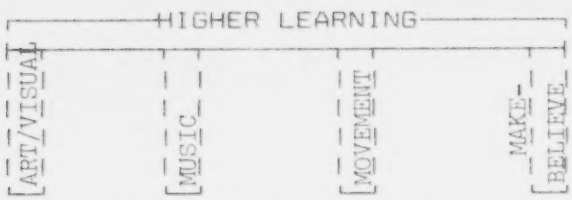
Within the scope of this article lies a synopsis of my findings and research in the area of creative arts. It is a compilation of ideas gleaned from studying children in virtually every context; from my own background in theater and language; and from a long-term matrimonial liaison with a musician, gifted in composition.

I've written a book entitled The Magic of Music, Movement, and Make-Believe. It is a book of lesson plan suggestions for teachers, and includes a recording of music that correlates. It occurred to me before starting that project that the experience of teaching children does include an element of magic. There are the intangible and instinctive things we choose, for instance. There are the mysterious results that are sometimes difficult to explain. But the definition of "magic," according to the Funk and Wagnall Dictionary is: "Anything that works with wonderful effect." From that language premise comes the confidence to challenge you to make magic. Much of what will be discussed here works like magic. It is my privilege to be with children and their teachers every day. That's the origin of most of these ideas. Even when Teacher is too polite, a child will let me know what is working with wonderful (or not so wonderful) effect!

There are many terms already in use for designating this area of learning: creative arts, creative drama, theater arts, musical arts and fine arts, for example. Because none of those describes exactly what I recommend, I've coined yet another term: "Developmental Dramatics."

Whatever else you forget, please remember this: The **process** is infinitely more important than the **performance** in this educational approach.

THE FOUR PILLARS OF THE FOUNDATION OF LEARNING



1. **ART/VISUAL.** This seems to be the art form of preference for Early Childhood teachers. It is very tangible and "parent pleasing." We all get accolades for the kind of creativity that can be taken home and taped to the refrigerator door.

There is certainly nothing wrong with creating art projects, if it's done properly and in balance. It's my observation, however, that many teachers spend a great deal of time training for this one aspect of teaching, and an inordinate amount of time preparing for and amassing the materials and ideas for art/visual. Ask yourself this question. "What percentage of my time is spent on project art?" Then follow with this question. "Why?" Is it because you are more gifted or comfortable in this area? Do you give in to parent pressure at the expense of other arts experiences?

One of the most "thought provoking" ways to utilize art/visual, is by using it as an integrated finish to a whole-art experience. A song, poem, story or playlet can be an "art start." From the visual, you can **see** what part of the experience came to the top for each child.

Another important integrated art/visual is to let the children create their own costumes and props and scenes. I'm always frustrated when I observe a "production," supposably by children, but obviously, the children are there mainly to wear parent-or-teacher-made costumes and provide photo opportunities in front of elaborate staging.

In order for this scene to be right for me, the children are spontaneously happy, proud and comfortable, wearing costumes and playacting in the context of sets and scenes that they have created themselves. It's certainly not difficult to let children paint backdrops at any age, and even the rearranging of furniture, blocks or cubes is a satisfying and creative experience for them.

In short, do not be tempted to "do it for them." What seems very right to you may not speak to the children at all. Their fantasy world is fresh and untouched by too much reality. Let them teach **you** what they see.

2. **MUSIC.** Since I'm married to a music educator, I know enough to start any discussion of music with the acknowledgment that music is, in and of itself, an education. It predates many of the disciplines of education, and certainly anything technological. Music is organize' into sets and appeals to the mathematical mind as well as the aesthetic.

Music needs no reason to be. It certainly belongs in the classroom. In every classroom. With the limitations imposed upon teachers of young children, however; it is only reasonable to key into this universal language of children, and use music to its fullest capacity as a teaching aid.

The language of music speaks so beautifully to children that the melody of the "Universal Children's Chant" is found in virtually every culture. How does that happen? Infants respond to rhythms and a "steady beat." There's magic here, and you will be remiss if you don't utilize every musical-magical opportunity.

Now, there seems to be less confidence among teachers, I've noted, in the area of music compared to art/visual. Few of us feel gifted in the area of music. I know how it feels to live in a family of musicians, and not be one! Though I've created the language and concepts of over 200 songs for children, I'm constantly reminded of my inadequacies musically.

It's important for non-musicians to remember that we are not expected to teach music, but we need to learn better ways to teach **with** music. Of course, we're going to have to really narrow down a vast subject. Here are the tips that teachers tell me have been the most helpful to them:

-- When singing spontaneously, make sure you sing in the children's vocal range, not yours. I call this the "C to C Rule." Children can only sing about eight notes, middle C to the octave C. I'm talking about the average child, not the musically gifted one or two you may have. Most teachers are altos or mezzo-sopranos, and the child's range is not comfortable for us. Our natural tendency is to start a song where we sound good, so that's what we do. I've had teachers assure me that their students were singing along with them, even though Teacher admitted to having a low voice. But without exception, when I've gone to observe and check it out, the children weren't really singing at all. They were chanting along in a sing-song fashion, in a valiant attempt to do what the teacher was asking them to do.

Children should have, and deserve to have a successful singing experience. Since you control that to a large

extent, find a pitch pipe or tone bell, and be purposeful about making music appropriately pitched. Don't forget, when choosing recorded music for the classroom, not all recording artists are singing in the child's range, either. There are those whose recordings are primarily music for listening entertainment, and you will note that children do not volunteer to "sing along." They can't, so don't insist.

Better yet, be an educated consumer, and listen for recordings that children can sing along with, thus enhancing the usefulness and enjoyability of the recording.

-- Help children find and recognize their "singing voice." Once they own this knowledge, children can learn to change back and forth from speaking to singing, thus enhancing your dramatic experiences, and they can start to protect their precious singing voices. You can sing their names or the day of the week (or anything) in a pitch pattern, and let them sing it back to you. Or practice singing the "Magic Words," and practice two things at once. It simply makes it more fun!

-- Learn a "steady beat." This is an easy exercise because you can find a steady beat with clapping, slapping thighs, pounding on the floor, or by finding the beat in your feet. Musical growth, such as success with instruments, will follow if you use music with a steady beat and let children listen and experiment. Perfection insn't necessary and the experience makes music more enjoyable forever.

-- Use a variety of styles of music. Many teachers make a big mistake by only choosing music of a singular style, because it is their favorite. Children have no prejudice about music. Classical music is especially effective, starting at infancy, for a multitude of experiences. We've searched through every musical style for new sounds that children can learn and love. Reggae, rap, soft rock, gospel, opera, Appalachian Mountain music, African, Caribbean, country, classical are all as enjoyable to children as the favorite of most children's artists -- folk music.

-- Care for and feed your musical equipment. Much of the beauty of the musical experience can be lost or jaded by carelessness. Records are particularly helpful in the classroom, but they must be clean, stored in dust jackets, and in an upright position. Just as you cherish and lovingly hold and turn pages on a beautiful book to transmit to children it's specialness, so should you treat recordings. Touch only on the edges, and when an errant fingerprint shows up on the grooves, clean with a commercial cleaner or "Joy" detergent, (no substitutions) and a soft towel. Rinse, dry and store.

Record players should be of good quality, or the sound will be inferior. (Remember, sound is the point here.) They don't make needles like they used to, so don't expect your needle to last very long. Dirty records ruin needles; bad needles ruin records. Inquisitive children ruin both. Be "in charge," and take care of your equipment.

3. **MOVEMENT.** Many children in this developmental stage don't have a choice about movement. Their bodies demand almost constant wiggling. Sitting still for any length of time should be accompanied by frequent inclusions of movement. Even storytelling time can be sprinkled with body rhythm sound effects and chances to "chime in."

The need and opportunities for movement in the early childhood classroom are so important and varied that it's hard to know where to start. Let's start with the obvious: outdoor play. Physical fitness inadequacies are a major concern in our culture. This outdoor play is very important and lets off steam. Encourage children to take advantage of this opportunity to use gross motor movement, and exercise lungs and heart.

Infrequent outdoor play, due to facility or inclement weather, challenges you to find good, and enjoyable, music and/or instructions for aerobic movement within your space. Even for the blessed few who have some scheduled PE time with an instructor, don't depend on it to meet the needs of the young child. Several times a day, Teacher and Class need to drop everything and just plain exercise. It refreshes and energizes in an appropriate manner.

Outdoor play or "exercise time" should be followed by a transitional movement. Even though children may act tired and flop on the floor or in chairs, the majority of them need a chance to "wind down" before they are really ready for a quiet experience. This is my favorite time to incorporate songs or poetry that can be "acted out." Interpretive movement bridges the gap nicely into your next stage. Often I invite them at the end of transitional movement to, "melt into a puddle," or imitate a sleeping animal or flower. Now we are fully exercised.

Any movement to be truly healthy, should have a warm-up (perhaps stretching movements), a movement that increases the heartbeat and lung expansion, and a cool-down. Include the children's thought process into this. They will be interested in the working of their bodies, and can think about what's happening now, and what should happen next.

"What about the child who refuses to join in?" is one of the questions teachers ask me most often. Sometimes, not always, children (particularly male) have heard from a family

member (perhaps an older sibling) that they are: a) "sissy" if they dance around, particularly if they seem to enjoy it, or, b) are clumsy and klutzy. It doesn't take very many suggestions of a negative nature to convince the insecure child not to risk being ridiculed. It won't help, either, to just ignore the movement-reluctant child, because as often as not, he/she is the very one who will be bouncing off the walls about the time everyone else is refreshed and ready to begin a quiet project.

First, I let the child know that movement isn't optional. It's a part of our plan, and it helps us keep healthy. I find ways to mention the role-models who are athletes, dancers and physical fitness advocates that the children can relate to and mention at home, if I suspect that is part of the problem. And most importantly, I keep that child close to me -- moving, dancing and exercising with him/her. We do it <u>together,</u> and there are lots of smiles and encouragement along the way, because I know it may take awhile before we have a "breakthrough."

We've spent a great deal of time studying how children like to move. The things we've written reflect the movements children love doing, not the ones I like to do. I hate to hop, for instance. Children love it. For some reason, it makes them laugh. I can't figure out why. There are many delightful creatures and things in their cognizance that they can imitate "hopping." They love to fall down. "Ring Around The Rosy," has endured for that reason alone. We've written an interpretive song that suggests, "When we're tired, we all fall down!" Then, " Pick yourself up. Brush yourself off." and off we go again. Children love to crawl and kick their feet in the air. We don't have to understand it, just use it creatively!

Some folk dancing and directional instructions are within their grasp, provided you are willing to devote some time to it. I know many teachers who are exceptionally successful at teaching traditional dances to very young children. I also know some Teachers who say that kind of success isn't even a distant possibility. What is the difference? It seems that the Teacher is the key -- does he/she think movement is worth the time and effort?

4. **<u>MAKE-BELIEVE.</u>** The greatest potential for creativity lies within this pillar. It can, and usually should, include all the previous elements, incorporated into an "experience" in creativity. The goals are many, but perhaps the most important one is to build self-esteem and confidence.

Developmental dramatics is a perfect framework for letting the children create. There are no boundaries here, and limitations are only those necessary for the good of

the group and the project. There is room for growth for each child, from the "class clown" to the most reserved.

Dramatic play in learning centers, and spontaneously originated by children is wonderful and important. A wise teacher will observe and listen carefully to any of this that occurs in the classroom or playground. From observation, you can assess the "leaders," the "followers," the "pouters," and the "facilitators." This will be valuable information when you become the guide in developmental dramatics.

The kind of make-believe I'm suggesting can most easily start with a story, or a song which has a good storyline; and give the children ample time to think about how to role-play. Talk about it, and give the thought process plenty of time. Discuss how the room can be rearranged to look right. What would the characters wear? How would they move? Are there voice changes or sounds that could be incorporated. The more time you take to develop the "play," the more involvement you'll get from the students. If you recreate it several times, you will see them adding more and more of their ideas each time.

Sometimes, in a storytelling mode, I'll model the story for them, donning hats and ears and voices and glasses, and walking through the spaces. This is particularly helpful early in your endeavors, to give them an idea start. Soon they'll have more ideas than you can use. You'll have to be uninhibited in order to encourage them to be. So ham it up and make them laugh.

It is easier to let the early experiences reflect the child's natural inclination. Let the aggressive children assume the pivotal roles. Give the shy, regressive child the role of sound effect person, or camera crew. More often than not, everyone will want to exchange roles for the next time through, and you've made progress in several departments!

The child bent on destructive behavior may have a bigger problem than developmental drama can solve, but there are many examples where "special needs" children have made good strides by being a part of these group projects. I've often suggested giving the role of "Stage Manager" to the child who doesn't manage him/herself well. Miraculous results sometimes happen when the self-image is changed, and the unmanageable child is put in the managing role. It's worth a try.

Inside the story, let the children sing songs they know that relate; dance a part of the story; chant nursery rhymes or poems they've written; count or measure; practice social skills you're teaching; solve problems; pantomime and

practice the language. With so many ways to teach and learn, this experience is never a waste of time. Teachers can learn from the children, especially, if Teacher is right in there being part of the "cast" and interacting.

Just a final word about efficiency. You need to make this easy enough so you won't get discouraged. Use minimal costumes, that's all children require. Keep them in a special place; I call mine "The Magic Closet." All of the props and costumes for any play can be kept in a zip-close bag, perhaps along with the book or music, and an index card that indicates anything you might need to add. That would include multi-useful items, such as, instruments, scarves, streamers, hats, etc.

Look for songs or stories that have lots of characters, action or fantasy. Try to add a ready-to-go zip-close bag full of make-believe adventure to your collection every month or two. Perhaps you can only manage three or four a year. Before long, you'll have a wonderful collection from which to choose. And don't worry, the children will ask to make-believe over and over again. They don't get tired of it, because it's a different creation each time. This is a nice change for children who live in a society of repetitive and passive television and video fantasies.

After a workshop session one day, a Teacher related to me a very important truth. Though we all agree children should and must be read to, she told me that the stories she read were frequently forgotten. "But they never forget the stories we act out," she said. "They remember the smallest detail for as long as they are in my class." In following children through several years of development in my own classes, I've found that the make-believe experiences last for years, with amazing vividness.

You do not have to give up valuable thinking skill teaching to provide your students with equally valuable creativity. Just integrate the two. It works like magic!